

If you've ever set foot in a deli - a real life, New York style deli or in my case a real-life Texas deli, then you know about the powerful and delightful smells that can attack your senses upon entry. In my restaurant, the traditional odors of hot corned beef and pastrami mixed with sauerkraut, bacon and horseradish combine with the popular fragrance of Texas brisket layered in a spicy bar-b-que sauce and the undeniable fragrance of apple and pecan pie. Homemade beef stew, French Onion soup and Texas chili are reducing in the kitchen while the entire restaurant fills with the aroma of good food. There is nothing quite like a deli kitchen prepping, baking, grilling, and cooking in the morning. These are the distinctive smells of my life before COVID-19.

Shortly after March of last year, the city of San Antonio shut down all dine-in operations throughout the city and instantly took away our morning routines and systems, forcing our restaurant to evolve just to survive. Overnight, we became a grocery store with a curbside service selling raw products like eggs, tomatoes, cold cuts, and sliced cheeses. The great morning aromas of the deli were replaced with the stale, cold odors of bleach and sanitizer. Sales dipped by seventy percent and even when dine-in was reopened to fifty percent capacity, we were forced to cut our menu by half. Now, as we keep paying for our holiday gatherings, the business has come back by half, but it just doesn't seem the same or at least the smells do not. We are more of a to-go business now with items packaged and tagged in sugar cane boxes and biodegradable containers. The sweet mixture of multiple savory recipes and meats cooking side by side has been replaced by vacuum sealed soups and cold cuts prepared in a sanitized and disinfected central kitchen.